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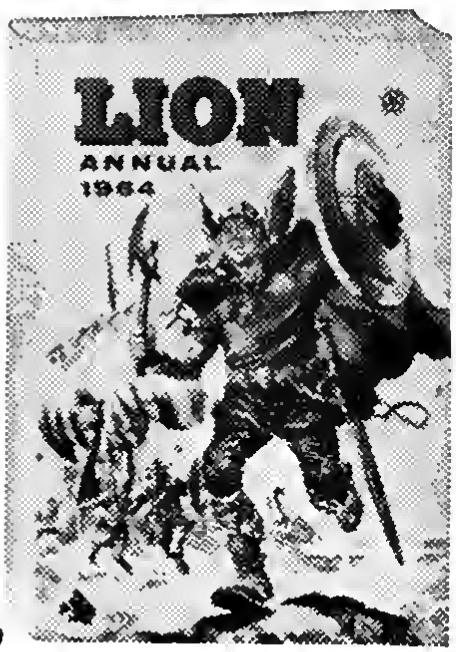

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THE UNDEFEATED

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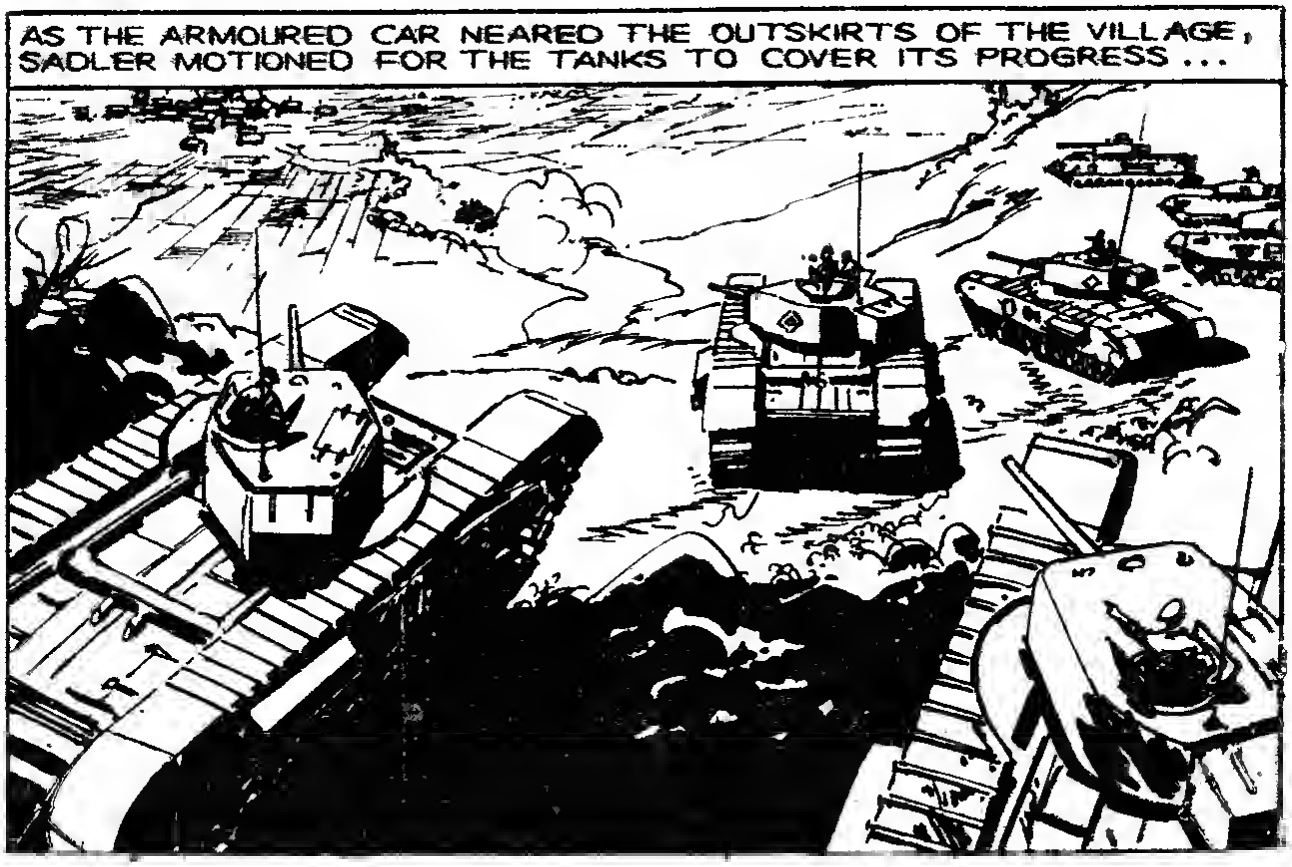
Chapter 1. Silent Village

BUT MAJOR TRELAWNEY, LIKE THE MAN HE WAS, DECIDED TO MAKE THE RECONNAISSANCE HIMSELF, LEAVING SADLER WATCHING HIS PROGRESS TOWARDS THE VILLAGE ...
THERE HE GOES AGAIN, MAKING A MOUNTAIN OUT OF A MOLE-HILL! WE'VE ENOUGH STRENGTH TO BEAT HALF THE GERMAN ARMY!

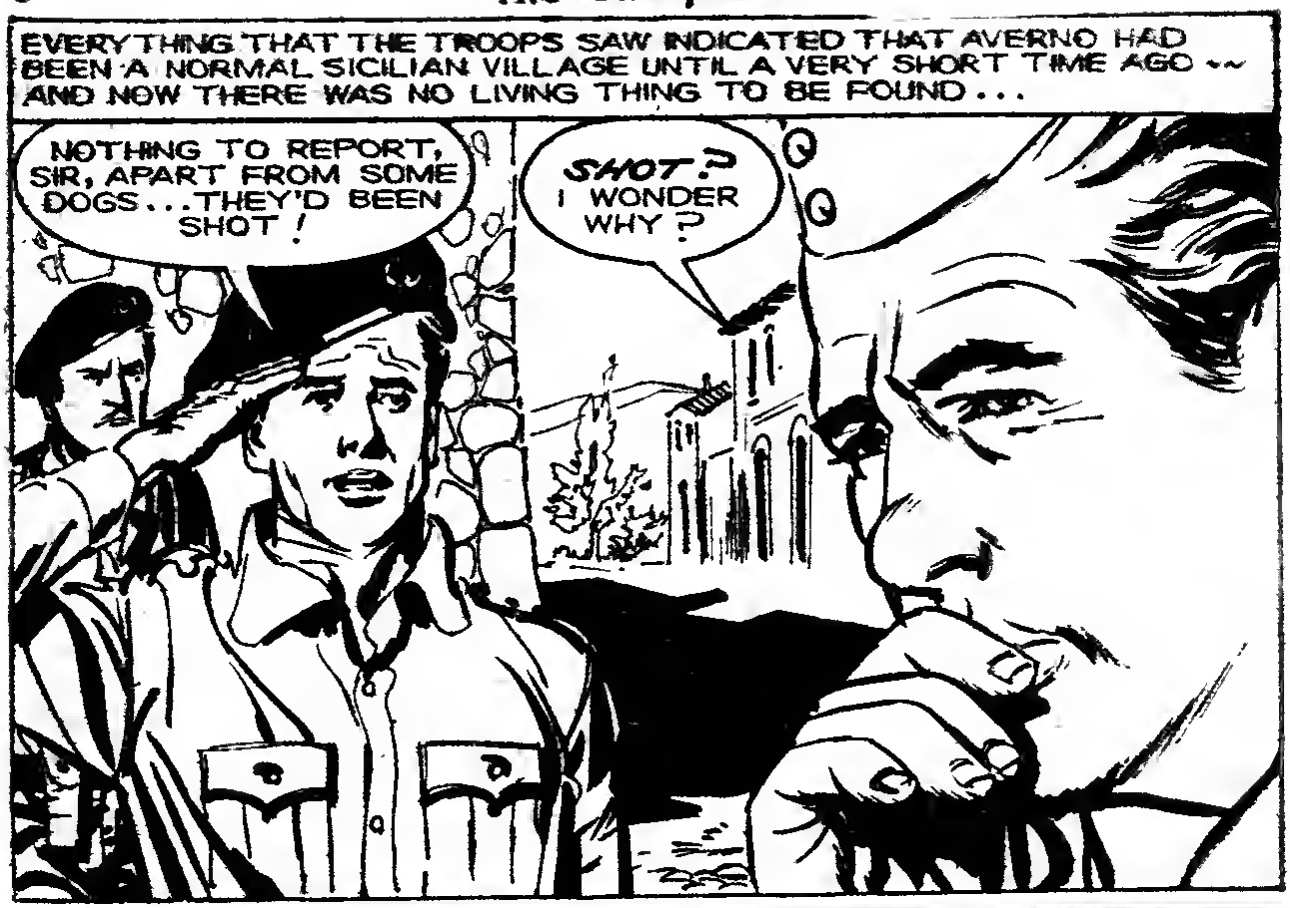

AS THE ARMOURED CAR NEARED THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE VILLAGE, SADLER MOTIONED FOR THE TANKS TO COVER ITS PROGRESS ...

PEERING THROUGH THE OBSERVATION SLIT OF THE ARMOURED CAR. TRELAWNEY COULD SEE THE STONE BUILDINGS AND THE NARROW COBBLED STREETS CLEARLY NOW. BUT STILL NOTHING MOVED ...
DARNED QUEER! NO DOGS! NO CHICKENS... NOTHING...

AFTER CIRCLING THE VILLAGE, TRELAWNEY ORDERED HIS DRIVER TO STEER STRAIGHT UP THE NARROW MAIN STREET. IF THERE WERE GERMANS IN AVERNO, THIS WAS THE TIME THEY WOULD SHOW THEMSELVES.
KEEP YOUR EYES SKINNED FOR TROUBLE, DRIVER!
YES, SIR!
AMICO ITALIANO
DUCE

TRELAWNEY'S CAR REACHED THE MARKET PLACE WITHOUT INCIDENT. SATISFIED THE VILLAGE WAS DESERTED, HE CALLED THE REST OF THE COLUMN IN . . .
TELL THE MEN TO HAVE A GOOD LOOK ROUND ~~ BUT WATCH OUT FOR BOOBY TRAPS!
RIGHT, SIR!
WHAT A DUMP! I BET THE INHABITANTS WERE GLAD TO LEAVE ALL THIS BEHIND!

CAUTIOUSLY AT FIRST AND THEN MORE BOLDLY, THE TROOPS SEARCHED THE POOR DWELLINGS.
HEY, BERT! THIS STEW'S STILL WARM~~AND THE FIRE'S STILL ALIGHT!
LOOKS AS IF THEY WERE JUST GOING TO HAVE THEIR GRUB.


EVERYTHING THAT THE TROOPS SAW INDICATED THAT AVERNO HAD BEEN A NORMAL SICILIAN VILLAGE UNTIL A VERY SHORT TIME AGO -- AND NOW THERE WAS NO LIVING THING TO BE FOUND...
NOTHING TO REPORT, SIR, APART FROM SOME DOGS...THEY'D BEEN SHOT!
SHOT? I WONDER WHY?

SUDDENLY, THE BARK OF A RIFLE SHATTERED THE SILENCE AND SHOUTING COULD BE HEARD COMING FROM THE EDGE OF THE VILLAGE.
HALT, OR I FIRE!
HOLD YOUR FIRE, THERE! I WANT HIM ALIVE!

THE HAPLESS SICILIAN PEASANT WAS SOON CAPTURED AND BROUGHT BEFORE TRELAWNEY WHO STARTED TO QUESTION HIM.
WHO ARE YOU? WHERE ARE THE VILLAGERS? COME ON, MAN, SPEAK UP!
BUT THE FRIGHTENED SICILIAN STAYED MUTE--AND SUDDENLY CAPTAIN SADLER LOST HIS PATIENCE.
HERE'S SOMETHING YOU'LL UNDERSTAND! NOW TALK, BEFORE I KILL YOU!
NO! NO!
AT THIS SUDDEN OUTBURST, MAJOR TRELAWNEY LEAPT FORWARD AND GRABBED HIS SECOND-IN-COMMAND'S WRIST ...
WHAT THE DEVIL DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING, CAPTAIN?
THIS MAN IS OBVIOUSLY A SPY AND IN MY BOOK, ALL SPIES ARE SHOT!

SADLER'S RUTHLESS OUTLOOK HAD BROUGHT HIM INTO CONFLICT WITH TRELAWNEY BEFORE.
I HOPE YOU HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN THAT THESE SICILIANS ARE OUR ENEMIES? THEY'VE BEEN FIGHTING US SINCE NINETEEN-FORTY!
I HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN, SADLER -- AND DON'T YOU FORGET THAT I AM IN COMMAND HERE, EITHER.

THE PRISONER WAS LED AWAY AND LOCKED UP FOR THE NIGHT, WHILE THE COLUMN FOUND BILLETS FOR ITSELF IN THE DESERTED VILLAGE.
WE CAN TAKE THE SICILIAN WITH US -- PERHAPS HE'LL TELL US WHAT HAPPENED WHEN HE'S GOT OVER HIS FRIGHT.

BUT WHEN SADLER CHECKED WITH THE GUARD NEXT MORNING HE DISCOVERED THAT THE PRISONER HAD ESCAPED.

HE GOT AWAY WITHOUT THE GUARD HEARING HIM, SIR.

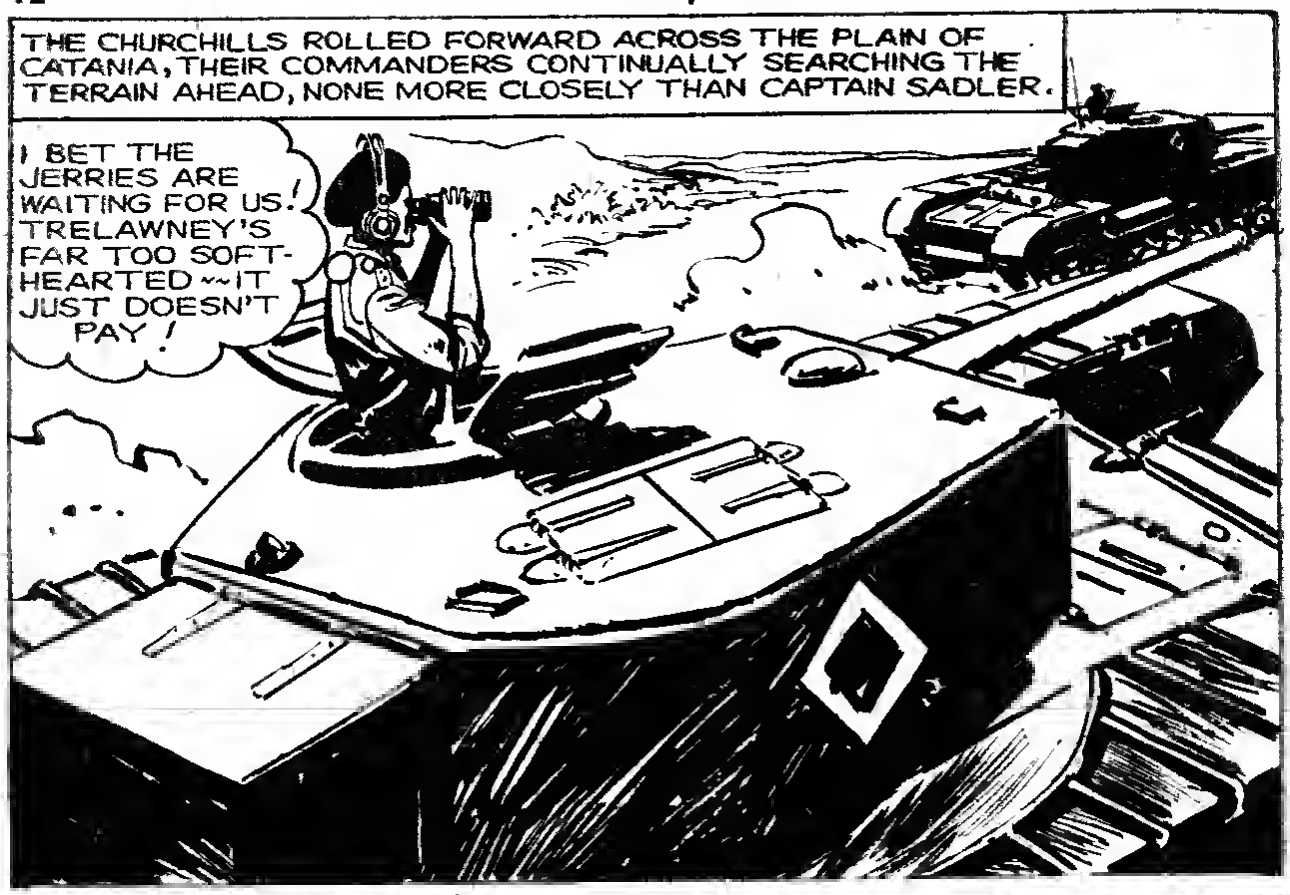
YOU'LL HEAR MORE OF THIS, SERGEANT. MAKE OUT A FULL REPORT. I'M GOING TO SEE MAJOR TRELAWNEY!

BENEATH SADLER'S ANGER LAY A SMUG SATISFACTION WHICH HE TOOK NO PAIN TO CONCEAL WHEN HE REPORTED TO TRELAWNEY.

I'M AFRAID YOUR PRECIOUS PRISONER HAS DONE A BUNK, SIR...TOOK ONE OF THE RIFLES IN THE BARGAIN. I EXPECT HE'S TOLD JERRY EXACTLY WHERE WE ARE NOW!

THANK YOU, CAPTAIN. GET THE COLUMN READY. THE SOONER WE'RE ON THE MOVE THE BETTER.

WITHIN HALF AN HOUR THE ARMOURED COLUMN WAS LEAVING THE VILLAGE OF AVERNO DESERTED ONCE MORE.


THE CHURCHILLS ROLLED FORWARD ACROSS THE PLAIN OF CATANIA, THEIR COMMANDERS CONTINUALLY SEARCHING THE TERRAIN AHEAD, NONE MORE CLOSELY THAN CAPTAIN SADLER.
I BET THE JERRIES ARE WAITING FOR US! TRELAWNEY'S FAR TOO SOFT-HEARTED ~~ IT JUST DOESN'T PAY!

THE ROAD WOUND UP INTO THE FOOTHILLS. IMMEDIATELY, TRELAWNEY CALLED THE REST OF THE COLUMN ON THE RADIO ...
ABLE LEADER TO ALL TANKS. STAND BY~~ THIS LOOKS LIKE AN IDEAL SPOT FOR AN AMBUSH!

HARDLY WERE THE WORDS OUT OF TRELAWNEY'S MOUTH WHEN A PIERCING SHRIEK RENT THE AIR AND HIGH-EXPLOSIVE SHELLS BURST AMONG THE COLUMN.

ABLE LEADER TO ALL TANKS--BACK UP OUT OF RANGE!

THE LEADING VEHICLES SWUNG ROUND AND RACED FOR SAFETY FROM THE DEADLY MENACE OF THE HIGH-VELOCITY, ARMOUR-PIERCING SHELLS THAT WERE SURE TO FOLLOW THE RANGING SHOTS.

TRAVERSE LEFT, GUNNER -- SELF-PROPELLED GUN ON THE RIDGE. TWO ROUNDS H.E.

ON TARGET, SIR!

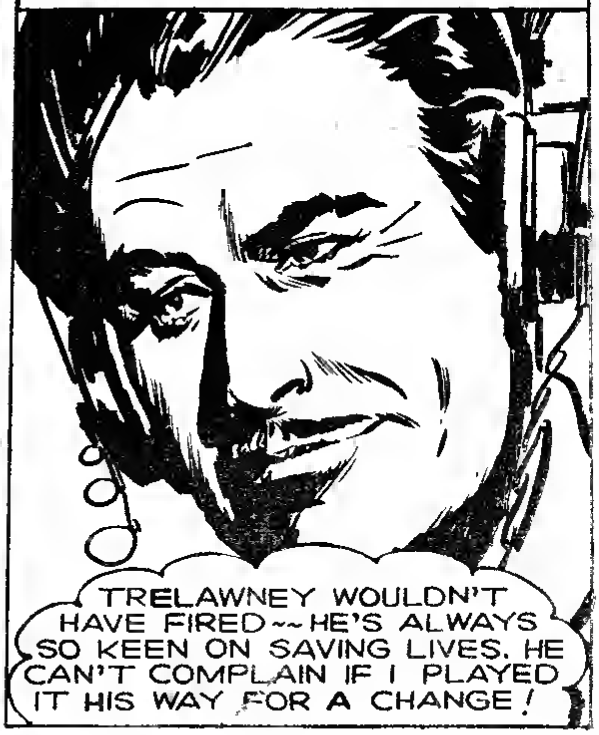
BUT AS TRELAWNEY GAVE THE ORDER TO FIRE AT THE ENEMY MOBILE GUN, A GIANT HAMMER-BLOW LIFTED THE TANK FEET INTO THE AIR . . .
THE ENGINE COMPARTMENT'S ON FIRE, SIR!
BALE OUT THEN-- QUICKLY!

THE FIVE CREWMEN OF THE TANK SCRAMBLED OUT AND FLUNG THEMSELVES INTO COVER JUST AS THE 40-TON CHURCHILL EXPLODED . . .
COR! WE DIDN'T GET OUT OF THAT ANY TOO SOON!
WE'RE NOT OUT OF THE WOOD, YET!

THE BATTLEFIELD WAS A SWIRL OF CONFUSION WITH THE STRANDED TANK CREW AT ITS CENTRE. THEN FROM OUT OF THE SMOKE AND DUST A VEHICLE RACED TOWARDS THEM...

SADLER'S TANK HAD HALTED OUT OF RANGE OF THE DISTANT ENEMY GUNS AND, PEERING THROUGH THE CHURCHILL'S PERISCOPE, HE WAS ABLE TO OBSERVE THE FATE OF HIS SUPERIOR OFFICER.

THE VITAL MOMENT PASSED AND TRELAWNEY AND HIS CREW WERE ROUGHLY BUNDLED INTO THE HALF-TRACK...



SOME OF THE BRITISH ARMOUR SWEPT ROUND IN A FLANKING MOVE BUT BY THE TIME THEY REACHED THE ENEMY POSITIONS IT WAS TOO LATE. THE GERMANS, HAVING INFLICTED DAMAGE AT NO LOSS TO THEMSELVES, HAD WITHDRAWN . . .

AND SO, AS THE ADVANCE WENT ON, CAPTAIN SADLER TOOK THE LEAD OF "A" SQUADRON . . .

MEANWHILE, TRELAWNEY, SEGREGATED FROM HIS COMPANIONS, WAS BEING INTERROGATED IN THE BACK OF A GERMAN STAFF CAR...

YOU WERE IN CHARGE OF THE TANK SQUADRON, I PRESUME, HERR MAJOR

YOU ARE ENTITLED TO KNOW MY NAME, RANK AND NUMBER, THAT IS ALL!

THE GERMANS, FORCED TO RETREAT ALL OVER THE ISLAND OF SICILY, BADLY NEEDED INFORMATION ABOUT THE ALLIED STRENGTH.

WE CANNOT GET ANYTHING OUT OF THE ENGLANDER OFFICER, HERR MAJOR.

WE HAVE NO TIME TO BE PLEASANT! TAKE HIM TO CATANIA. THE GESTAPO ARE THERE. THEY WILL DEAL WITH HIM!

AS DUSK FELL, THE STAFF CAR WAS SPEEDING THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS ON THE WAY TO THE COAST. ***BUT IT NEVER REACHED ITS DESTINATION!***

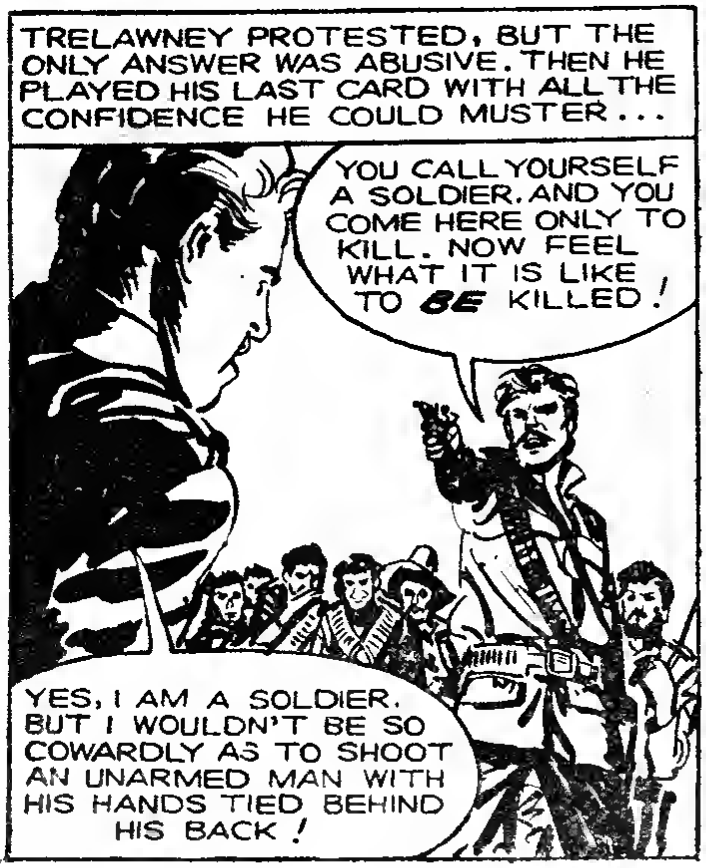
TRELAWNEY RECOVERED CONSCIOUSNESS SLOWLY. AT FIRST HE COULD NOT UNDERSTAND WHERE HE WAS. THEN, AS HIS SENSES CLEARED, HE REALISED THAT HE WAS STRAPPED TO THE BACK OF A DONKEY.

HIS CAPTORS STOPPED FOR THE NIGHT IN A MOUNTAIN CAVE... TRELAWNEY WAS DUMPED UNCEREMONIOUSLY INTO A CORNER, FROM WHERE HE WAS ABLE TO PICK UP SCRAPS OF THE CONVERSATION...

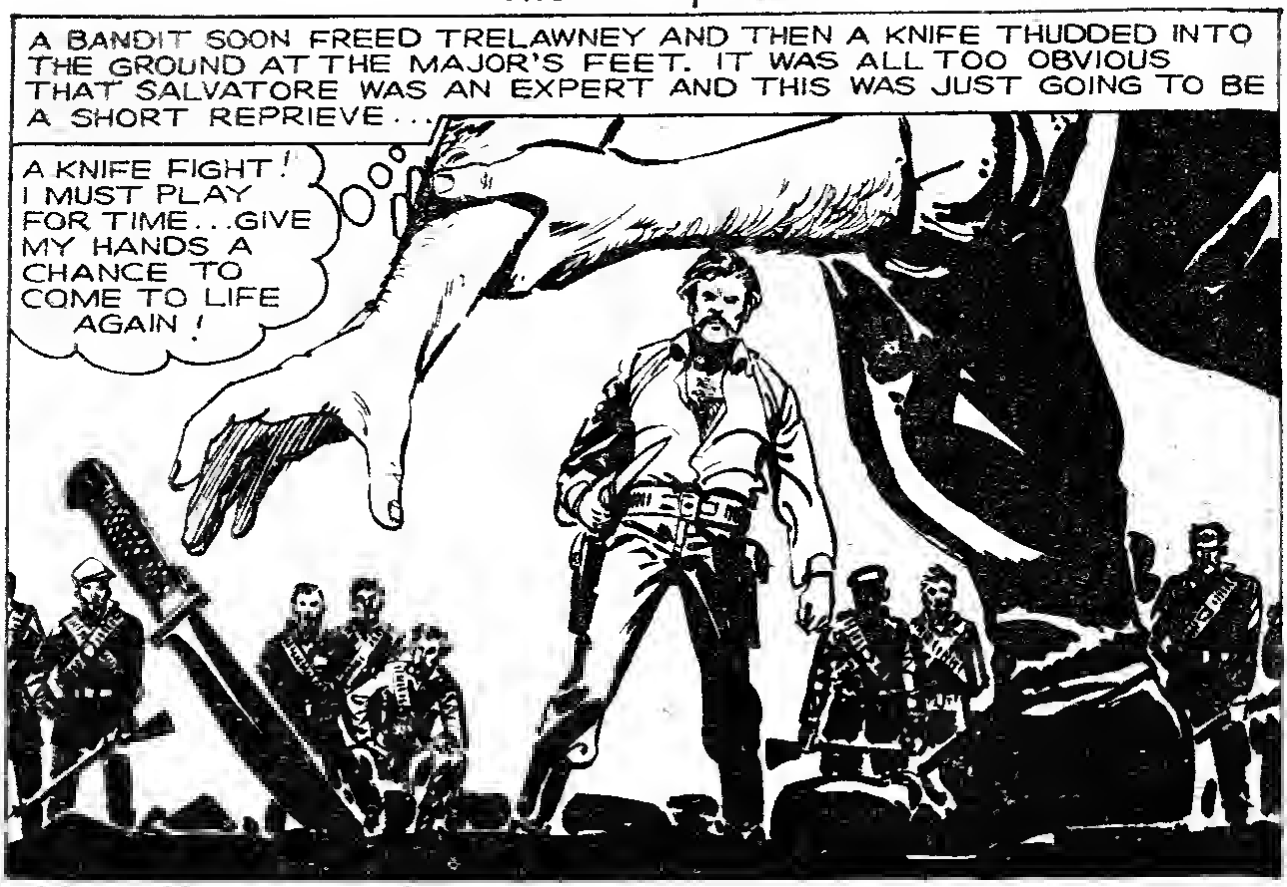
NEXT MORNING, THE LITTLE CAVALCADE MOVED ON, EVER HIGHER INTO THE MOUNTAINS UNTIL THEY EVENTUALLY ARRIVED AT A CLEARING...
AH! SO! WHAT IS YOUR NAME?
I AM MAJOR TRELAWNEY OF THE BRITISH ARMY-- AND WHO ARE YOU?

THE SICILIAN'S EYES NARROWED AS HE TOOK THE PISTOL FROM THE HOLSTER AT HIS SIDE AND AIMED IT AT TRELAWNEY'S HEART...
I AM SALVATORE-- I AM THE LEADER HERE. I HAVE KILLED MANY GERMANS! NOW, I THINK I AM GOING TO KILL MY FIRST ENGLISHMAN!

TRELAWNEY, STUNNED BY THE TURN OF EVENTS, STOOD GAZING IN HORROR AT THE RUTHLESS SICILIAN ...
BUT WHY ? I HAVE DONE YOU NO HARM !
NO HARM ? YOU AND THE GERMANS COME HERE ~~YOU SHOOT OUR PEOPLE~~ YOU KILL OUR ANIMALS~~YOU BOMB OUR CITIES ! YOU CALL THIS NO HARM ?


TRELAWNEY PROTESTED, BUT THE ONLY ANSWER WAS ABUSIVE. THEN HE PLAYED HIS LAST CARD WITH ALL THE CONFIDENCE HE COULD MUSTER ...
YOU CALL YOURSELF A SOLDIER. AND YOU COME HERE ONLY TO KILL. NOW FEEL WHAT IT IS LIKE TO BE KILLED !
YES, I AM A SOLDIER. BUT I WOULDN'T BE SO COWARDLY AS TO SHOOT AN UNARMED MAN WITH HIS HANDS TIED BEHIND HIS BACK !

A FROWN FLICKERED ACROSS SALVATORE'S SWARTHY FACE, BUT IT WAS SOON REPLACED BY A CUNNING SMILE ...
VERY WELL ! UNTIE THIS SO BRAVE ENGLISHMAN !


A BANDIT SOON FREED TRELAWNEY AND THEN A KNIFE THUDDED INTO THE GROUND AT THE MAJOR'S FEET. IT WAS ALL TOO OBVIOUS THAT SALVATORE WAS AN EXPERT AND THIS WAS JUST GOING TO BE A SHORT REPRIEVE...
A KNIFE FIGHT! I MUST PLAY FOR TIME...GIVE MY HANDS A CHANCE TO COME TO LIFE AGAIN!

TRELAWNEY GRIPPED THE KNIFE AS BEST HE COULD, COPYING SALVATORE'S HOLD WITH THE CUTTING EDGE UPPERMOST. WARILY, THE TWO MEN CIRCLED EACH OTHER...
GUN OR KNIFE--WHAT DOES IT MATTER, ENGLISHMAN? YOU ARE STILL GOING TO DIE!
HE'S PROBABLY RIGHT--BUT AT LEAST I'LL GO DOWN FIGHTING!

THERE WAS A FLASH OF STEEL AS SALVATORE SPRANG FORWARD AND SWEPT HIS BLADE UPWARDS IN A GLITTERING ARC . . .

HA! THAT WAS CLOSE, EH, ENGLISHMAN? NEXT TIME . . .

BUT WHEN SALVATORE REPEATED THE MANOEUVRE, TRELAWNEY WAS READY. HE SMACKED THE SICILIAN'S HAND ASIDE WITH HIS LEFT HAND AND, IN TURN, THRUST FORWARD WITH HIS KNIFE . . .

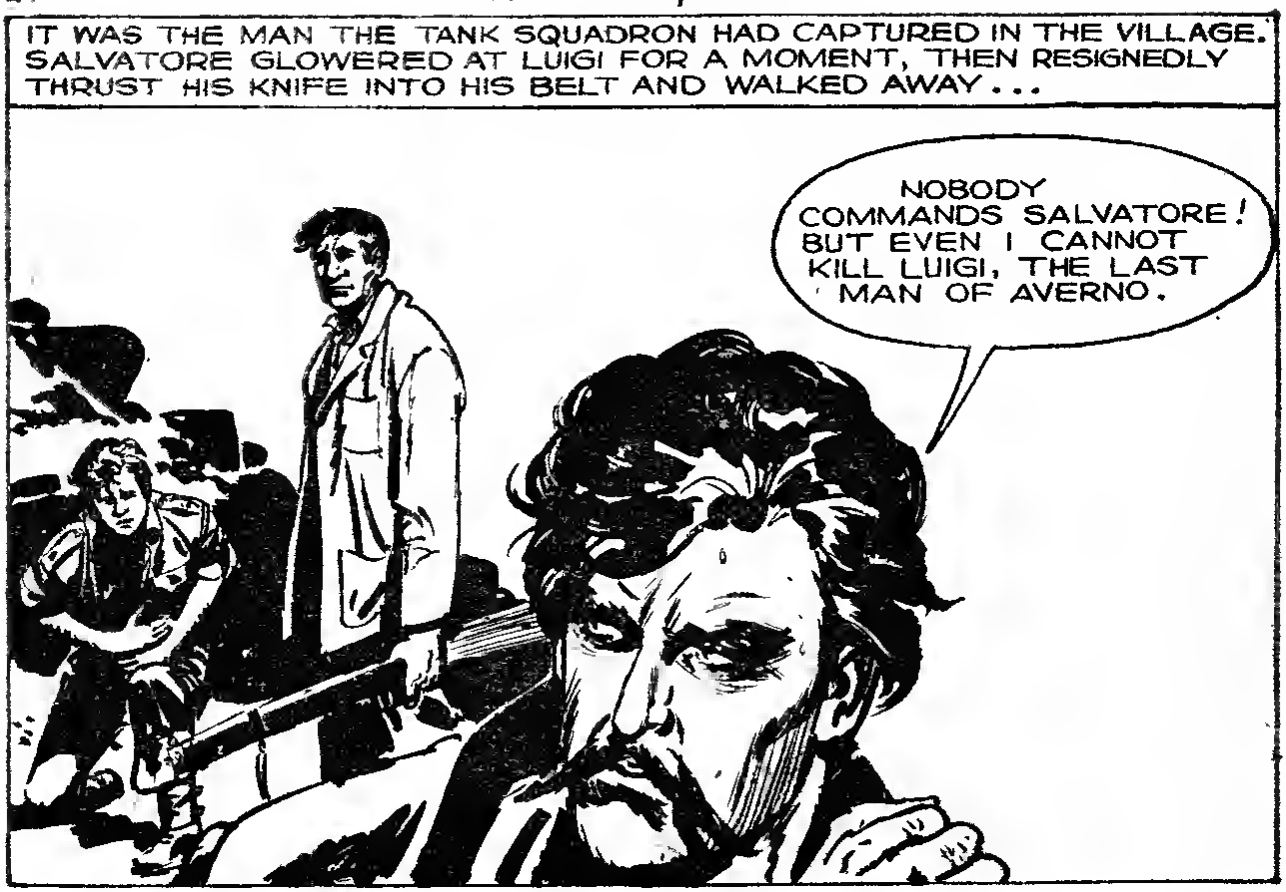
AAAGH!

IT'S YOU OR ME, SALVATORE!

ENRAGED AND HURT, THE SICILIAN BROUGHT HIS KNEE UP INTO TRELAWNEY'S STOMACH. GASPING WITH PAIN, THE ENGLISHMAN DROPPED TO THE GROUND AND AS HE DID SO, A VICIOUS KICK SENT HIS KNIFE FLYING FROM HIM . . .
PIG! FOR THAT YOU DIE SLOWLY!
UGH!

TRELAWNEY, GASPING WITH PAIN, LAY HELPLESS. SALVATORE TOWERED OVER HIM, KNIFE AT HIS THROAT. . .
SAY YOUR PRAYERS, ENGLISHMAN!
NO!

A RIFLE BULLET WHISTLED ABOVE SALVATORE'S HEAD AND THE SWARTHY BANDIT LEADER LEAPT ROUND LIKE A CAT, EYES BLAZING.
WHO DARES~~ YOU, LUIGI?
YES. THIS ENGLISHMAN SAVED MY LIFE. HE IS NOT OUR ENEMY~~HE IS A BRAVE FRIEND!


IT WAS THE MAN THE TANK SQUADRON HAD CAPTURED IN THE VILLAGE. SALVATORE GLOWERED AT LUIGI FOR A MOMENT, THEN RESIGNEDLY THRUST HIS KNIFE INTO HIS BELT AND WALKED AWAY . . .
NOBODY COMMANDS SALVATORE! BUT EVEN I CANNOT KILL LUIGI, THE LAST MAN OF AVERNO.

LUIGI STOOPED AND HELPED TRELAWNEY TO HIS FEET. THE OTHER BANDITS DRIFTED AWAY AND TRELAWNEY REALISED WITH RELIEF THAT HE WAS NO LONGER IN DANGER.
THANK YOU ~~ YOU SAVED MY LIFE! I THOUGHT THAT WAS MY LOT, JUST THEN!
I WAS GLAD TO REPAY THE DEBT I OWED YOU ~~ WE ARE QUITS, NOW.

Chapter 2. Last Man of Averno

TRELAWNEY FOUND THAT HE WAS NOW UNDER LUIGI'S PROTECTION. NOBODY MOLESTED HIM ~~ EVEN SALVATORE ONLY SCOWLED AT HIM FROM A DISTANCE ...

TRELAWNEY KNEW HE WAS REFERRING TO SADLER AND REALISED THAT WHAT HE SAID WAS TRUE. LUIGI WAS OBVIOUSLY NO KILLER HIMSELF ~~ AND YET HE WAS TREATED WITH STRANGE RESPECT BY THE REST OF THE BAND ...

BEFORE THEY TURNED IN FOR THE NIGHT, TRELAWNEY ASKED THE QUESTION THAT HAD BEEN TROUBLING HIM SINCE HE HAD SEEN THAT SILENT VILLAGE ON THE PLAIN ...

THERE WAS SILENCE FOR A MOMENT AND TRELAWNEY WONDERED IF LUIGI WOULD ANSWER. THEN, STARING INTO SPACE, LUIGI SPOKE ...
IT WAS THE ACCURSED BOCHE THAT DID IT! AN S.S. REGIMENT FELL UPON US LIKE A PACK OF WOLVES...
AND TRELAWNEY KNEW THAT THE SICILIAN WAS LIVING THE PAST AGAIN.

"THERE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN BANDITS HERE IN THE HILLS ~~ PEOPLE LIKE SALVATORE. THE LAND WAS POOR, THEY COULD LIVE NO OTHER WAY. BUT WE IN AVERNO ~~ WE WERE FARMERS..."
YOU CANNOT DO THIS... WITHOUT FOOD OUR ANIMALS WILL DIE! WE HAVE GIVEN ALL WE CAN SPARE!
PAH! YOU HAVE MORE HIDDEN AWAY SOMEWHERE, I KNOW YOU PEASANTS! ANYWAY, THE GERMAN ARMY IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN YOUR HALF-STARVED ANIMALS.

"THEY MADE OUR LIVES INTOLERABLE. OUR LIVESTOCK, WE OURSELVES STARVED... SOME EVEN DIED. SO SOME OF US, TOO, BECAME BANDITS..."

HURRY! HURRY! THE PATROL WILL BE HERE SOON. HIDE THAT FOOD WELL!

"WE KNEW THAT IF THEY CAUGHT US WE WOULD BE SHOT. BUT WE ALWAYS WORKED WELL AWAY FROM THE VILLAGE. THEN, A WEEK AGO, WE JOINED WITH SOME OF SALVATORE'S MEN TO MAKE AN AMBUSH IN THESE HILLS..."

WATCH LUIGI, HE WILL GIVE US THE SIGNAL.

I SEE HIM~~ AND I HEAR THE LORRY!

"WE FIRED THE CHARGE AT JUST THE RIGHT MOMENT. BUT THE LORRY DID NOT CARRY FOOD...IT WAS GOING TO THE S.S. REGIMENT THAT WAS TO DEFEND AVERNO...AND IT WAS PACKED WITH AMMUNITION..."
"I WAS FARTHEST AWAY AND I ALONE ESCAPED. ALL I CAN REMEMBER AFTER THAT IS WAKING UP AND SEEING A GERMAN PATROL BELOW ME IN THE CRATER..."
I KNOW THESE MEN--THEY ARE FROM AVERNO, SIR!
ARE THEY, INDEED? PUT THEM IN THE TRANSPORT--THE OBERST WILL BE PLEASED TO KNOW WHO HAS BEEN CAUSING HIM SO MUCH TROUBLE.

"THE S.S. REGIMENT WAS BASED IN AVERNO. THEY PLANNED TO DEFEND IT AGAINST THE BRITISH, BUT THEY WERE SHORT OF AMMUNITION AND THE DESTRUCTION OF THAT LORRY LOAD MEANT THEY HAD TO WITHDRAW..."
THERE IS NO DOUBT OF IT, SIR. FELDWEBEL METZ RECOGNISES THESE MEN. THEY LIVE HERE!
SO! BECAUSE OF THESE SWINE I MUST RETREAT. VERY WELL, IF AVERNO WISHES TO MAKE WAR ON ME ~~ I WILL TEACH IT WHAT WAR CAN MEAN.

"FROM WHERE I HID I COULD SEE THE GERMANS CARRYING THE CARCASES OF OUR ANIMALS TO THEIR LORRIES...THEN THEY LINED UP ALL MY PEOPLE IN A FIELD AND THE OBERST GAVE AN ORDER..."
FEUER!

LUIGI'S STORY ENDED AND HE SAT MOTIONLESS, HIS FACE A MASK OF SORROW...
SO THAT IS WHY SALVATORE CALLED YOU 'THE LAST MAN OF AVERNO'.
YES. I ALONE AM LEFT~~AND THEY HAVE SWORN TO AVENGE ME.

TRELAWNEY LAY AWAKE FOR A LONG TIME THAT NIGHT AND WHEN HE FINALLY FELL ASLEEP HE KNEW WHAT HE MUST DO. IN THE MORNING, HE TACKLED LUIGI ...

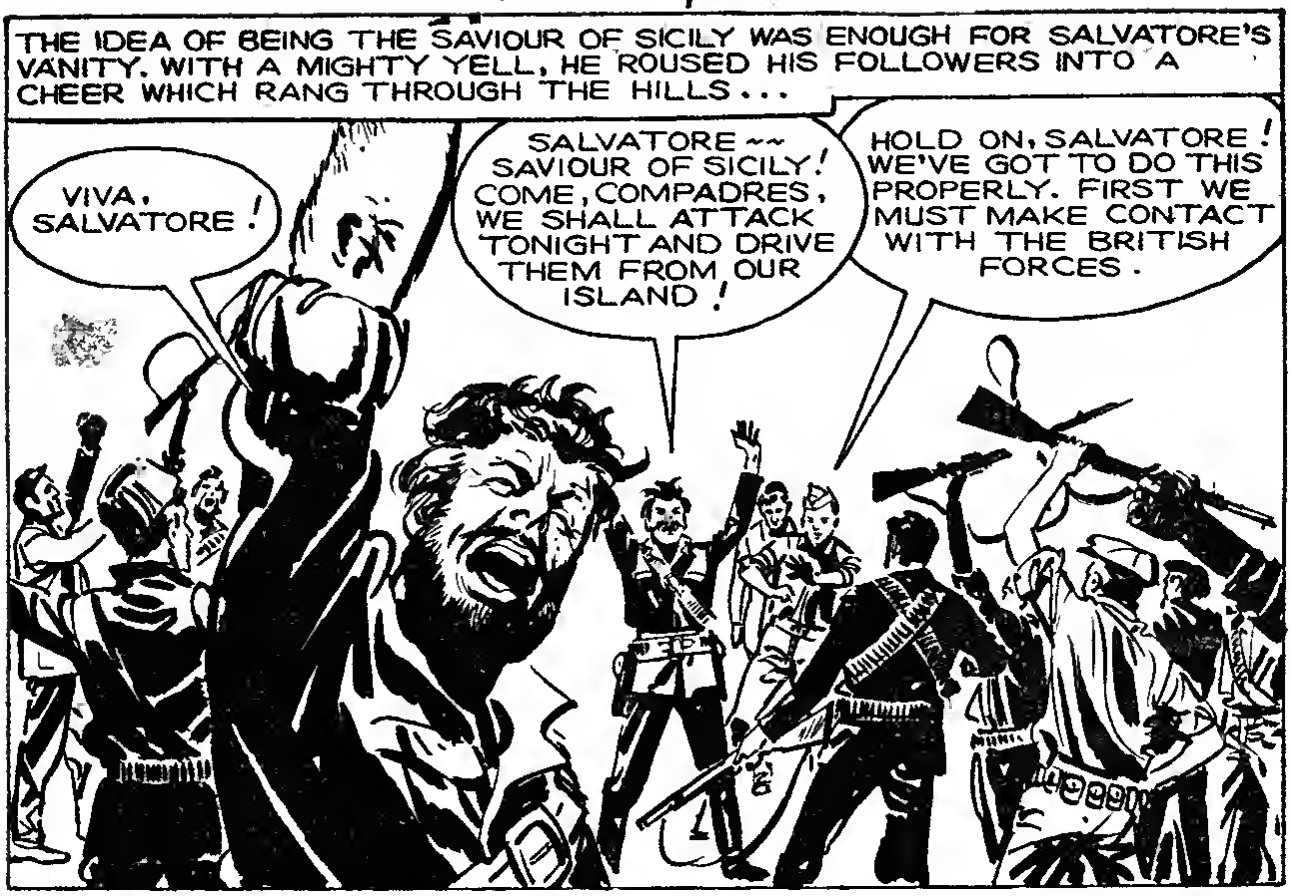
LOOK, LUIGI, WE BOTH WANT THE SAME THING! TOGETHER WE COULD DRIVE THE NAZIS BACK TO WHERE THEY CAME FROM!

WHAT YOU SAY IS TRUE~~ I WILL SPEAK TO THE OTHERS.

SALVATORE WAS THE STUMBLING BLOCK~~AS THEY KNEW HE WOULD BE~~ BUT THEY GRADUALLY WON HIM OVER...

AND WHEN WE HAVE HELPED YOU, WHAT WILL HAPPEN AFTERWARDS? THE AUTHORITIES WILL SAY~~THESE ARE BANDITS, WE HAVE THEM NOW. WE WILL PUT THEM IN JAIL!

WHO WILL DARE TO TOUCH YOU WHEN YOU HAVE HELPED TO DRIVE OUT THE GERMANS? YOU WILL BE A HERO TO YOUR PEOPLE~~ AND THE BRITISH WILL BE YOUR FRIENDS!


THE IDEA OF BEING THE SAVIOUR OF SICILY WAS ENOUGH FOR SALVATORE'S VANITY. WITH A MIGHTY YELL, HE ROUSED HIS FOLLOWERS INTO A CHEER WHICH RANG THROUGH THE HILLS...
VIVA, SALVATORE!
SALVATORE ~~ SAVIOUR OF SICILY! COME, COMPADRES, WE SHALL ATTACK TONIGHT AND DRIVE THEM FROM OUR ISLAND!
HOLD ON, SALVATORE! WE'VE GOT TO DO THIS PROPERLY. FIRST WE MUST MAKE CONTACT WITH THE BRITISH FORCES.

SALVATORE'S FIRST FLUSH OF ENTHUSIASM SOON PASSED AND HE AGREED TO ACCOMPANY LUIGI AND TRELAWNEY ON THE HAZARDOUS TRIP THROUGH THE GERMAN LINES...
GOOD LORD! THE PLACE IS CRAWLING WITH JERRIES! HOW ARE WE GOING TO GET ROUND THEM, SALVATORE?
NOT EASY~~BUT I WILL LEAD. I SEE THE WAY WE MUST GO.

NIGHT CAME AND THE THREE MEN MOVED FORWARD. WITH SALVATORE IN THE LEAD, THEY SLUNK ALONG DITCHES AND CRAWLED THROUGH DUSTY PATCHES OF SCRUB, ALWAYS ON THE ALERT FOR GERMAN PATROLS OR SENTRIES ...
THAT'S TORN IT! WE'LL NEVER GET PAST HIM!
WE CANNOT GO BACK NOW. IT WILL SOON BE DAWN.
THERE'S ONLY ONE THING TO DO--LEAVE HIM TO ME!

SALVATORE DISAPPEARED INTO THE DARKNESS. PEERING FORWARD THE OTHER TWO SAW A SHADOW RISE FROM THE GROUND AT THE VERY FEET OF THE GERMAN SENTRY...
GOSH, THAT WAS QUICK!
HE IS LIKE A CAT, THAT ONE! BUT NOW WE MUST HURRY!

THE THREE MEN FLED INTO THE DARKNESS. ONCE, DISTANTLY BEHIND THEM, THEY HEARD SHOUTS AND THE RATTLE OF GUNFIRE . . .
SOUNDS LIKE THEY HAVE FOUND THE SENTRY.
HOW MUCH FARTHER, SALVATORE? IT'LL SOON BE LIGHT.

THEY WERE NEARLY RUNNING NOW IN THEIR HASTE TO CLEAR THE GERMAN LINES BEFORE DAWN. SUDDENLY A SHOT CRACKED ABOVE THEIR HEADS AND DARK SHAPES ROSE FROM BEHIND ROCKS AND BUSHES . . .
HANDS UP, JERRIES! HALTEN!
THEY WILL NOT KILL ME WITHOUT COST TO THEMSELVES!
DON'T SHOOT--THEY'RE BRITISH!

THEY HAD BLUNDERED INTO AN ADVANCE PARTY OF THE RECONNAISSANCE CORPS. UNDER GUARD, THEY WERE DESPATCHED POST HASTE TO COMPANY H.Q.
THIS CHAP SAYS HE BELONGS TO YOUR OUTFIT.
TRELAWNEY! GREAT SCOTT! WE THOUGHT YOU WERE DEAD!

HIS IDENTITY ESTABLISHED, TRELAWNEY WAS ABLE TO TAKE SALVATORE AND LUIGI TO THE BRIGADIER IN CHARGE OF THE SECTOR...
THIS IS SALVATORE, SIR. THE LEADER OF THE-- ER--BANDITS.
JOLLY PLEASED TO MEET YOU--WE COULD DO WITH SOME HELP. THE JERRIES ARE PUTTING UP QUITE A HARD FIGHT!

YOUR OLD SQUADRON IS STILL IN THE VAN, TRELAWNEY, BUT THEY'RE UP AGAINST AN S.S. REGIMENT AND I FANCY SADLER IS FINDING THE JOB TOUGHER THAN HE EXPECTED.

AT THAT MOMENT, SADLER WAS FACING STIFF OPPOSITION. MUCH TO HIS DISGUST, HE HAD ONLY ONE CHOICE LEFT TO HIM...

ALL RIGHT--PULL BACK, PULL BACK! THEY'VE CAUGHT US IN THE OPEN, CURSE THEM!

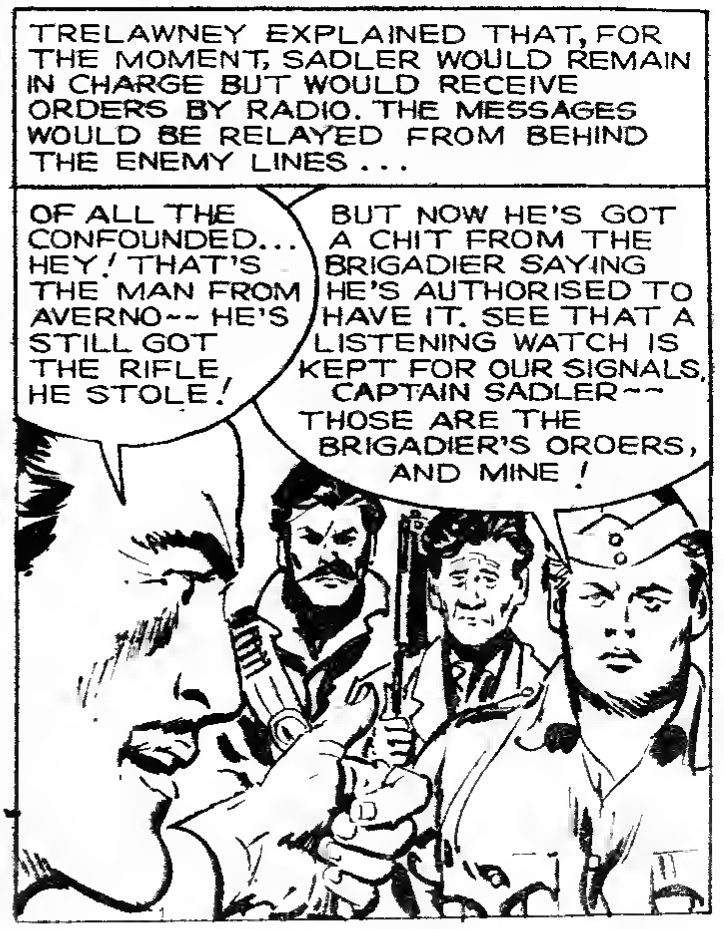
THE S.S. PANZER REGIMENT COVERING THE GERMAN RETREAT WERE FORMIDABLE OPPONENTS. SADLER HAD ALREADY LOST MANY OF HIS BEST CREWS AND THE MORALE OF THE REST WAS DROPPING...

WHERE'S THE DARNED INFANTRY? THEY'RE SUPPOSED TO DEAL WITH THOSE ANTI-TANK GUNS!

THAT'S IT, ALWAYS BLAME SOMEBODY ELSE! WE'D GET ON BETTER IF YOU DIDN'T GO AT EVERYTHING LIKE A BULL AT A GATE!

BUT FATE HAD YET ANOTHER BITTER SHOCK IN STORE FOR CAPTAIN SADLER ...
I AM THE COMMANDING OFFICER OF THIS SQUADRON AND WHEN I GIVE AN ORDER I WANT IT CARRIED OUT IMM .....
EXCUSE ME, SIR, I THINK YOU OUGHT TO LOOK BEHIND YOU ...

SADLER FLUSHED SCARLET AS HE RECOGNISED HIS OLD COMMANDER ...
YOU! BUT I THOUGHT YOU WERE...
DEAD? AS YOU CAN SEE, I'M NOT. SORRY, SADLER~~ I AM ASSUMING COMMAND OF THE SQUADRON ONCE MORE !


TRELAWNEY EXPLAINED THAT, FOR THE MOMENT, SADLER WOULD REMAIN IN CHARGE BUT WOULD RECEIVE ORDERS BY RADIO. THE MESSAGES WOULD BE RELAYED FROM BEHIND THE ENEMY LINES ...
OF ALL THE CONFOUNDED... HEY! THAT'S THE MAN FROM AVERNO~~ HE'S STILL GOT THE RIFLE, HE STOLE!
BUT NOW HE'S GOT A CHIT FROM THE BRIGADIER SAYING HE'S AUTHORISED TO HAVE IT. SEE THAT A LISTENING WATCH IS KEPT FOR OUR SIGNALS, CAPTAIN SADLER~~ THOSE ARE THE BRIGADIER'S ORDERS, AND MINE !

THE JOURNEY BACK THROUGH THE GERMAN LINES WAS FILLED WITH DANGER AND AS EACH HOUR TICKED BY, TRELAWNEY GREW MORE UNEASY AS TO THE SUCCESS OF THE OPERATION . . .
HEY, LUIGI! HOW MUCH FARTHER? WE SEEM TO BE GOING ROUND IN CIRCLES!
I DO NOT KNOW, MAJOR. ONLY SALVATORE KNOWS.

BUT TRELAWNEY'S FEARS WERE SOON QUELLED FOR SUDDENLY, AS THEY CAME OUT ON A SMALL PLATEAU, SALVATORE CALLED A HALT.
HERE! HERE THE AEROPLANES CAN DROP THE GUNS. IS GOOD PLACE, YES?
YES, IT'S A GOOD PLACE--BUT YOU MIGHT HAVE TOLD US WE WERE NEARLY THERE.

TRELAWNEY LOST NO TIME IN GETTING OFF HIS FIRST RADIO MESSAGE AND THEN ALL THEY COULD DO WAS WAIT FOR THE SUPPLY DROP THAT THE BRIGADIER HAD PROMISED TO LAY ON ...
I WONDER IF WE CAN BRING THIS OFF? THE BRIGADIER SEEMS TO THINK SO~~ BUT WHAT'S HE GOT TO LOSE ? SOME ARMS AND AMMUNITION~~ AND ME !
THEN THE DRONE OF A DAKOTA'S ENGINES DISPELLED TRELAWNEY'S MOMENT OF DOUBT. COLOURED TORCHES FLASHED THE PRE-ARRANGED SIGNAL AND MINUTES LATER, THE SUPPLY PARACHUTES WERE DRIFTING EARTHWARDS.
NOW WE CAN REALLY FIGHT THE GERMANS !
I HOPE SO, SALVATORE, I HOPE SO!
BY STICKING TO SECRET PATHS ACROSS INHOSPITABLE MOUNTAINS, SALVATORE HAD KEPT HIS TINY FORCE OUT OF DANGER. BUT NOW THEY HAD TO GO DOWN TO THE VALLEYS ...
WHEN WILL WE SEE THE BRIDGE ?
IT CANNOT BE FAR, NOW!

SALVATORE TOOK THEM INTO A THICK WOOD. LUIGI AND TRELAWNEY DREW LEVEL WITH SALVATORE AND FOUND THEMSELVES DIRECTLY ABOVE THEIR OBJECTIVE ~~THE BRIDGE . . .

THE BRIDGE WAS THE ONLY MEANS OF CROSSING THE CANYON AND ALREADY THE EXPLOSIVES WERE IN POSITION, READY TO SHATTER THE ANCIENT STONEWORK . . .

REVERBERATING THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS CAME THE CRASH AND THUNDER OF BATTLE AS THE BRITISH ATTACK MOVED NEARER.
HELLO, ABLE LEADER ~~ THIS IS RED ONE ~~ AM IN POSITION ... OVER.
HELLO, RED ONE ~~ THIS IS ABLE LEADER ~~ POSITION BAKER CHARLIE ONE FIVE ... OVER.

THE S.S. PANZER REGIMENT WERE FIGHTING A SKILFUL REARGUARD ACTION AND THE ADVANCE WAS SLOW ...
JUST WHAT THE HECK DOES TRELAWNEY THINK HE CAN DO WITH A CROWD OF EYTIE CROOKS ?

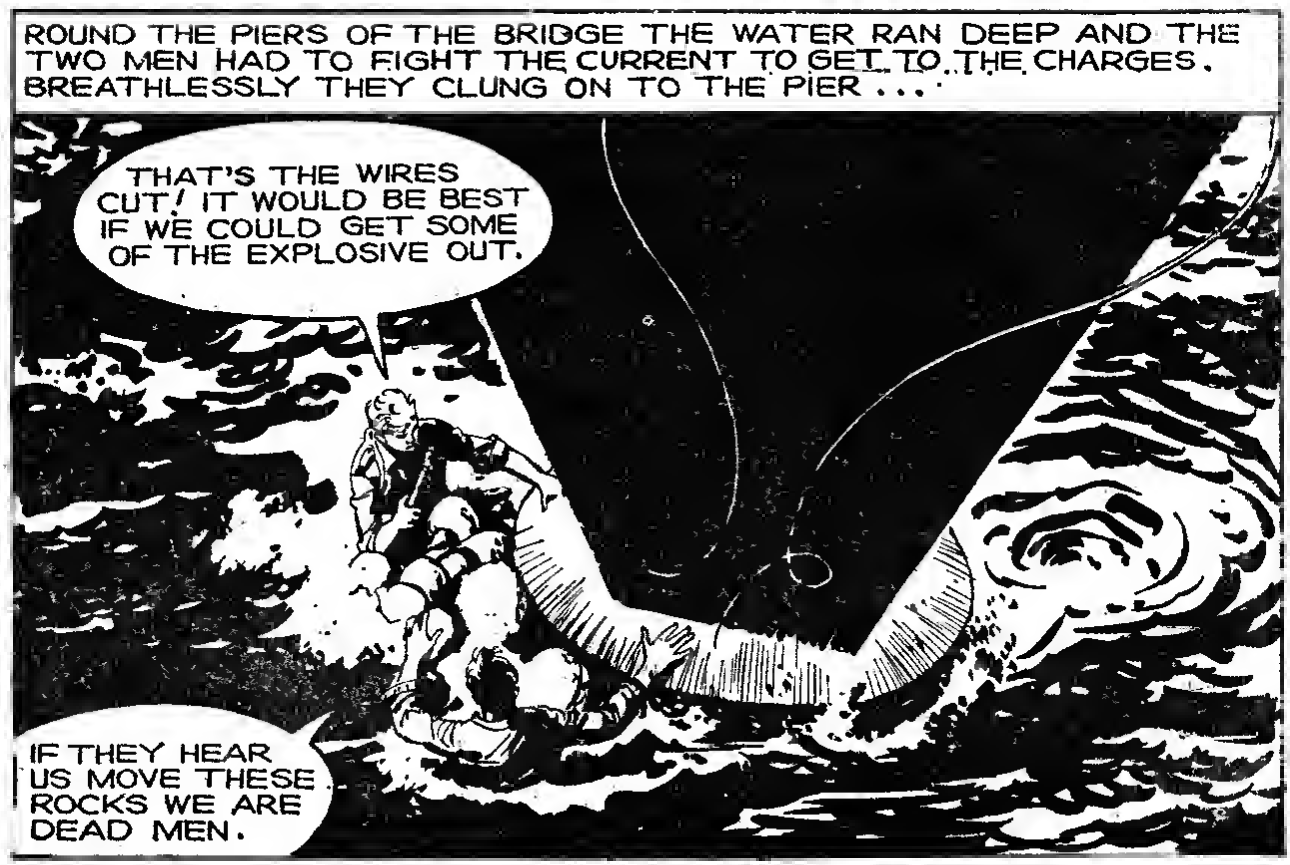
DURING THE NEXT TWENTY-FOUR HOURS, TRELAWNEY MADE THE SICILIANS PRACTISE AGAIN AND AGAIN WITH THEIR NEWLY-ACQUIRED WEAPONS.
SO! THEY ARE READY TO FIRE. THAT WAS GOOD ~~ VERY QUICK.
NOT BAD, BUT THEY MUST PRACTISE AGAIN TONIGHT. I WANT THEM TO BE ABLE TO SITE AND FIRE THAT MACHINE GUN IN THE DARK!

Chapter 3. The Bridge

THEN, AT DUSK ONE EVENING, CAME THE TIME TO ACT...

THE FIRST PHASE OF THE OPERATION CLICKED INTO PLACE. SALVATORE AND TRELAWNEY HAD THE MOST DANGEROUS TASK -- PUTTING OUT OF ACTION THE CHARGES THAT WERE ATTACHED TO THE BRIDGE...

THE MOON SHONE FITFULLY THROUGH THE SCUDDING CLOUDS AND EACH TIME IT ILLUMINATED THEM, TRELAWNEY AND SALVATORE HAD TO STAND STOCK-STILL IN THE FREEZING WATER...


ROUND THE PIERS OF THE BRIDGE THE WATER RAN DEEP AND THE TWO MEN HAD TO FIGHT THE CURRENT TO GET TO THE CHARGES. BREATHLESSLY THEY CLUNG ON TO THE PIER...
THAT'S THE WIRES CUT! IT WOULD BE BEST IF WE COULD GET SOME OF THE EXPLOSIVE OUT.
IF THEY HEAR US MOVE THESE ROCKS WE ARE DEAD MEN.

WITH INFINITE CAUTION THEY TOOK AWAY SOME OF THE ROCKS THEN REMOVED THE EXPLOSIVE AND SANK IT IN THE RIVER. THEN, JUST AS CAREFULLY, THEY REPLACED THE ROCKS AND TUCKED THE SEVERED WIRES BACK INTO THEM . . .

THERE, THAT SHOULD FOOL THEM!

COME, LET US DISMANTLE THE OTHER ONE.

THEY WERE STILL WORKING ON THE SECOND PIER WHEN A GUARD HAPPENED TO LOOK OVER THE PARAPET DIRECTLY ABOVE THEM AND THEIR HEARTS ALMOST STOPPED BEATING.

FOR WHAT SEEMED AN ETERNITY THE GERMAN STOOD THERE LOOKING DOWN THE RIVER. BUT AT LAST HE TURNED AND RESUMED HIS SLOW PATROL . . .

THAT'S THE LOT THEN, SALVATORE. LET'S GET OUT OF HERE!

DON'T RUSH~~ THEY MUST NOT HEAR US NOW!

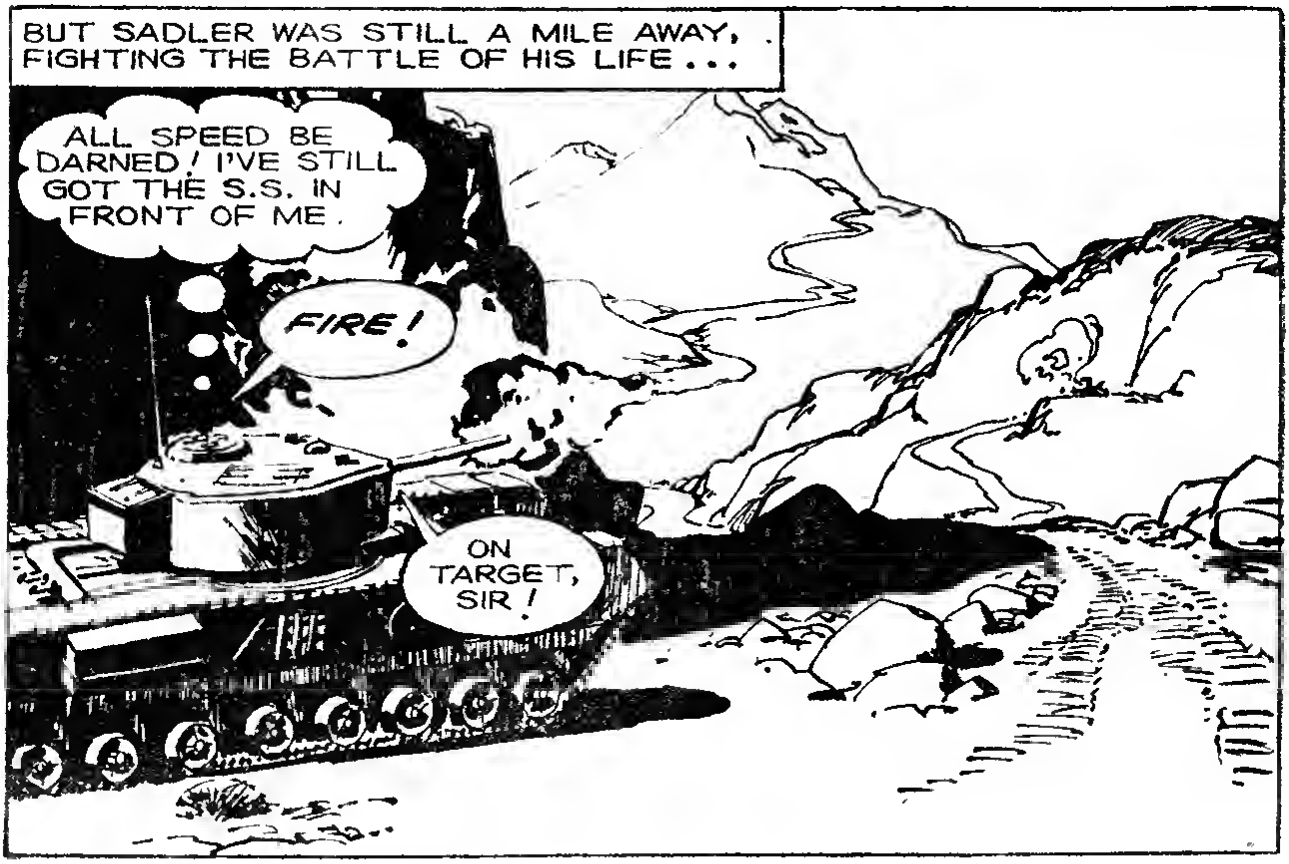
TRELAWNEY ALREADY KNEW THAT THE BRITISH WOULD ATTACK AT DAWN ~~ AND NOW HE WAS ABLE TO GIVE THEM THE NEWS THEY WERE EAGERLY AWAITING . . .
TRELAWNEY'S DONE IT, GENTLEMEN. THE BRIDGE IS SAFE. NOW IT'S UP TO US TO GET THERE BEFORE HE AND HIS MEN ARE WIPED OUT.
SADLER'S SQUADRON IS NEAREST ~~ EVERYTHING DEPENDS ON HIM!

IN THE EARLY HOURS OF THE MORNING THE SICILIANS SLIPPED SILENTLY INTO POSITION UNDER COVER OF DARKNESS. THEY HAD ONE GREAT ADVANTAGE ~~ THE GERMANS WERE NOT EXPECTING AN ENEMY TO ATTACK THEM FROM BEHIND.
COME ON, COME ON, THE SUN WILL BE UP SOON.
WE STILL HAVE THE S.S. BETWEEN US AND THE BRITISH.

EVEN BEFORE THE SUN CAME OVER THE HORIZON THE NOISE OF THE BRITISH BOMBARDMENT THUNDERED AND ROLLED ROUND THE MOUNTAINS. TRELAWNEY WAITED AS LONG AS HE DARED. THEN GAVE THE SIGNAL FOR THE BANDITS TO ATTACK...

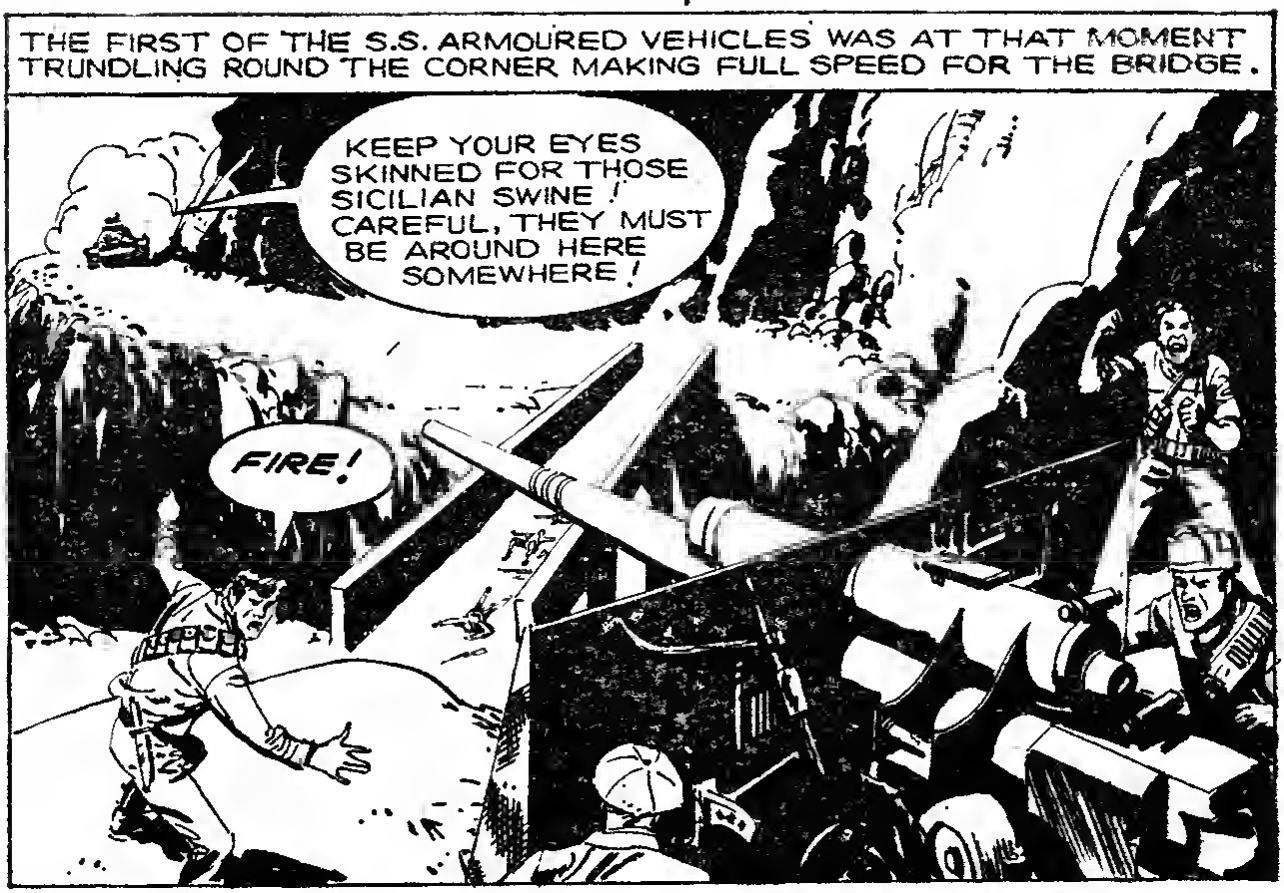
VICKERS AND BREN SPAT LEADEN DEATH FROM THE HIDDEN POSITIONS TO WHICH THE SICILIANS HAD DRAGGED THEM ...

IN MINUTES, THE POSITION AT THE BRIDGE HAD CHANGED. NOW IT WAS THE SICILIANS, NOT THE GERMANS, WHO HELD THE BALANCE OF POWER...
HELLO, ABLE LEADER, THIS IS RED ONE. WE ARE IN CONTROL BUT WILL SOON NEED YOUR HELP. ADVANCE WITH ALL SPEED. OVER.


BUT SADLER WAS STILL A MILE AWAY, FIGHTING THE BATTLE OF HIS LIFE...
ALL SPEED BE DARNED! I'VE STILL GOT THE S.S. IN FRONT OF ME.
FIRE!
ON TARGET, SIR!

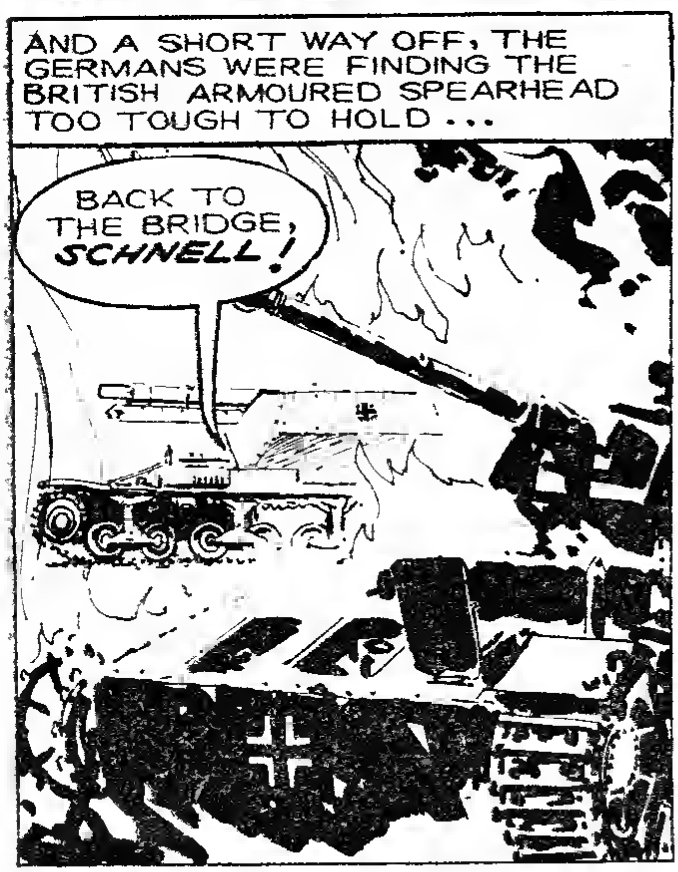
ONLY TWO GERMANS REMAINED AND THEY WERE IN A CONCRETE BLOCKHOUSE SHIELDED BY THE OVERHANGING CLIFF. FROM THERE THEY WERE TO BLOW THE BRIDGE . . .
YES, HERR COMMANDANT-- I UNDERSTAND.

THE GERMAN AREA COMMANDER HAD ALREADY BEEN WARNED OF THE REVERSAL AND HE WAS WORKING TO RETRIEVE THE SITUATION . . .
THE S.S. ARE PULLING BACK BUT WE MUST BE READY TO DESTROY THE BRIDGE IMMEDIATELY THERE IS ANY CHANCE OF OUR BEING OVERRUN. MAKE SURE THE PLUNGER IS READY FOR INSTANT USE !
JA, HERR LEUTNANT.


THE FIRST OF THE S.S. ARMOURED VEHICLES WAS AT THAT MOMENT TRUNDLING ROUND THE CORNER MAKING FULL SPEED FOR THE BRIDGE.
KEEP YOUR EYES SKINNED FOR THOSE SICILIAN SWINE! CAREFUL, THEY MUST BE AROUND HERE SOMEWHERE!
FIRE!

MANY OF THE BANDITS WERE DESERTERS FROM THE ITALIAN ARMY AND THEY WERE FAMILIAR WITH THE WORKING OF THE CAPTURED GERMAN ANTI-TANK GUN...
HIMMEL! OUT, EVERYONE--OUT!

LUIG'S DEADLY ACCURATE RIFLE WAS COMING INTO ITS OWN, TOO...
AHA, LUIGI, YOU HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN HOW TO SHOOT!
I REMEMBER THAT THESE ARE THE BUTCHERS WHO DESTROYED AVERNO~~ THEN I CANNOT MISS!


AND A SHORT WAY OFF, THE GERMANS WERE FINDING THE BRITISH ARMOURED SPEARHEAD TOO TOUGH TO HOLD...
BACK TO THE BRIDGE, SCHNELL!

THE MOMENT HE FELT THE ENEMY OPPOSITION BEGIN TO WEAKEN, SADLER SENT THE SQUADRON STORMING FORWARD.
HELLO, ALL STATIONS, THIS IS ABLE LEADER. ADVANCE... ADVANCE!

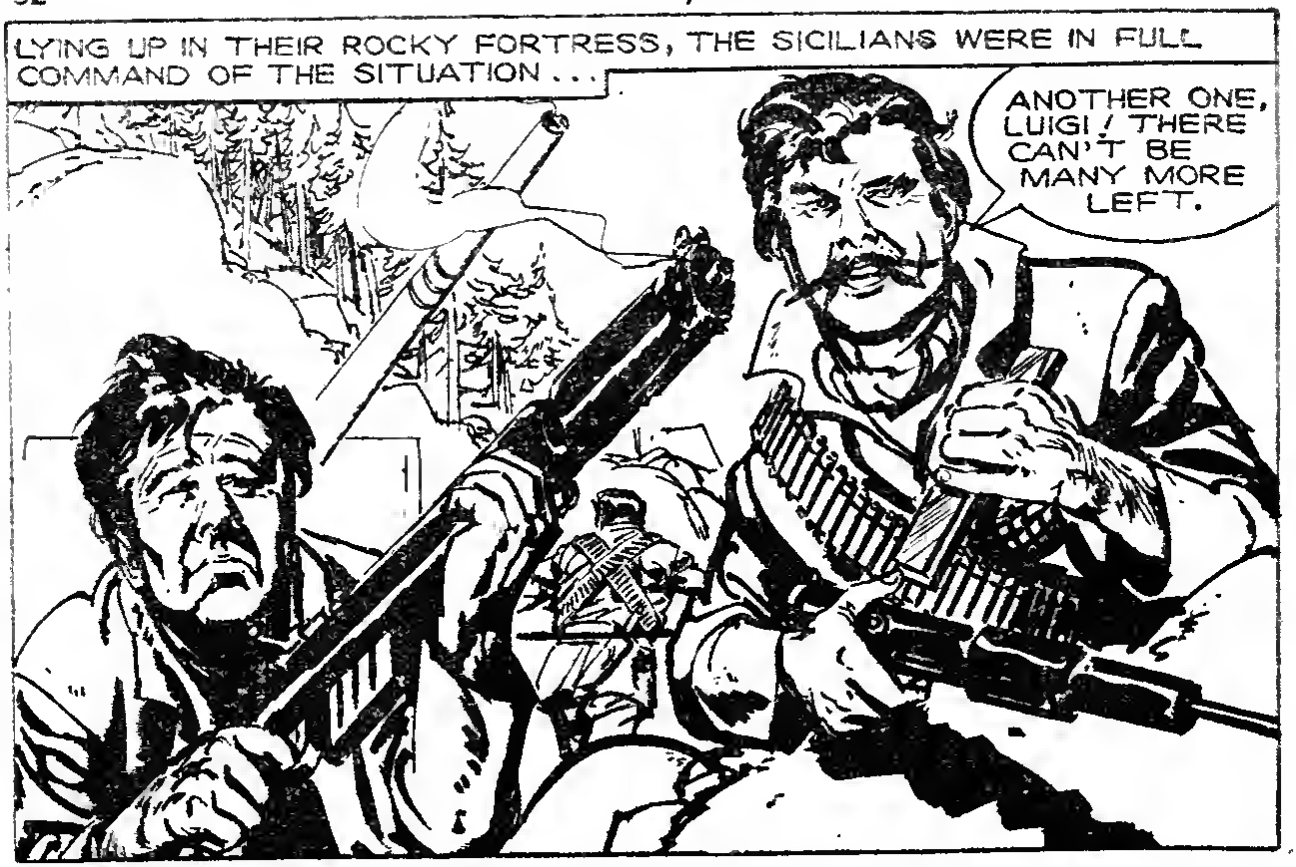
THE APPROACH TO THE BRIDGE WAS A SCENE OF TERRIFYING DEVASTATION MADE WORSE BY THE RUTHLESS TACTICS OF THE RETREATING S.S.

BUT, SIR, THAT CAR IS ONE OF OURS AND THE CREW ARE WOUNDED.

PUSH IT OFF THE ROAD--IT IS BLOCKING THE WAY!

BUT EVEN AS THE TIGER MOVED FORWARD AFTER CLEARING A PATH, AN ARMOUR-PIERCING SHELL SMASHED ONE OF ITS TRACKS. OUT OF CONTROL, THE MONSTER LURCHED SIDEWAYS OVER THE EDGE OF THE PRECIPICE ...

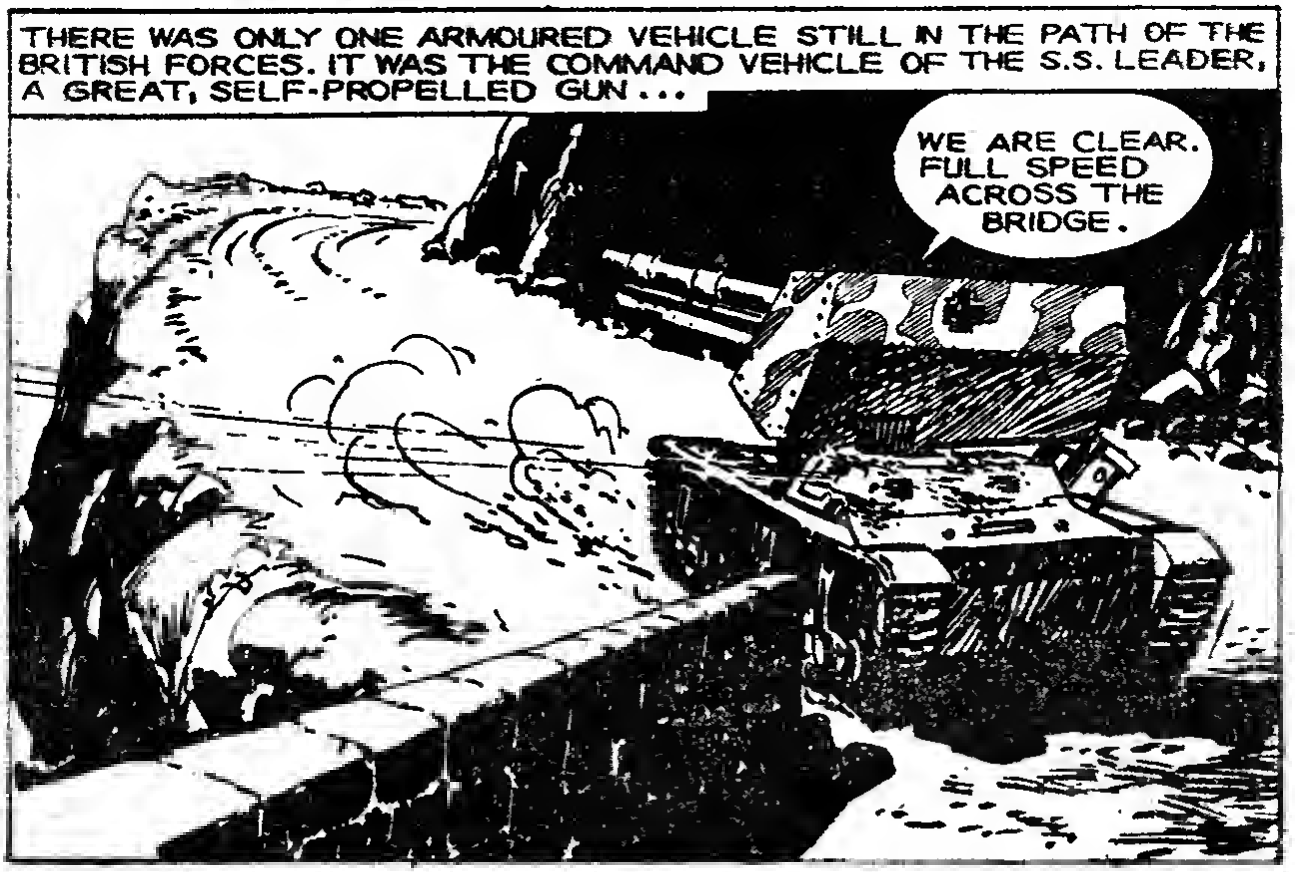
THE GERMAN LEUTNANT IN THE BLOCKHOUSE WATCHED IN HORROR AS THE S.S. REARGUARD WERE SMASHED BEFORE HIS EYES...
THEY'LL NEVER GET THROUGH! WE CAN WAIT NO LONGER, FELDWEBEL! BLOW THE BRIDGE!
JAWOHL, HERR LEUTNANT!
BUT THE DEATHLY HUSH THAT FOLLOWED THE PRESSING OF THE PLUNGER MOCKED THE HARSH COMMAND OF THE LEUTNANT...
NOTHING HAPPENED, SIR.
BUT THE BRIDGE... TEUFEL! THE WIRE MUST BE BROKEN!
THE GERMAN OFFICER MADE A GALLANT BUT VAIN ATTEMPT TO REPAIR THE DAMAGE FOR HE WAS SWIFTLY PICKED OFF BY A SICILIAN SNIPER.
AAGH!


LYING UP IN THEIR ROCKY FORTRESS, THE SICILIANS WERE IN FULL COMMAND OF THE SITUATION . . .
ANOTHER ONE, LUIGI ! THERE CAN'T BE MANY MORE LEFT.

BUT SALVATORE'S JUBILATION WAS TO BE SHORT-LIVED FOR THE GERMANS WERE QUICK TO RETALIATE.
INTO THE WOODS~~ TAKE THEM FROM THE REAR !

BEFORE LONG, THE ENEMY HAD SUCCEEDED IN OUTFLANKING THE AMBUSHERS' POSITION.
SAPRISTI! THEY ARE BEHIND US!

THE VANGUARD OF THE BRITISH ARMOUR WAS NOT FAR AWAY -- BUT NOW EVEN SECONDS MEANT THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH.
HELLO, ABLE LEADER, THIS IS TRELAWNEY. WE CAN'T HOLD OUT MUCH LONGER.

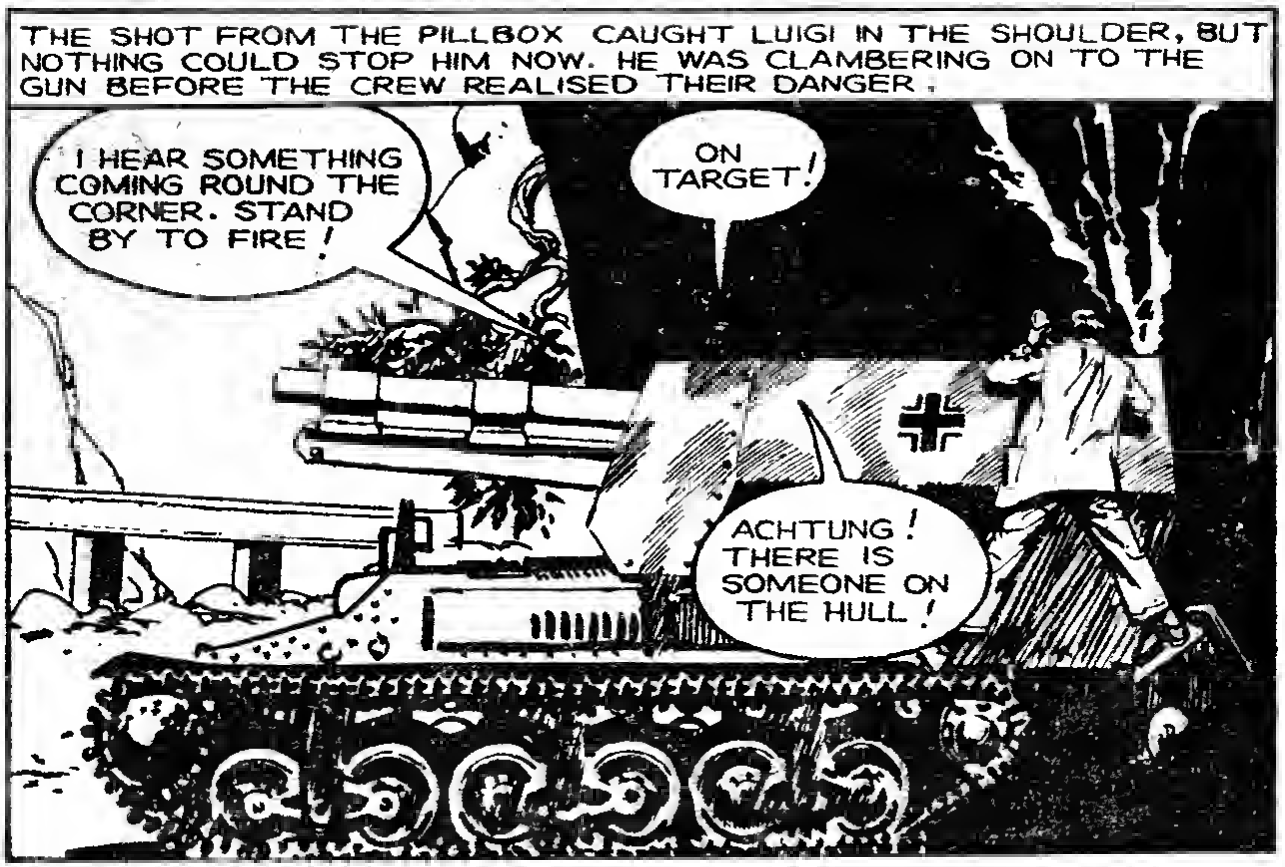

THERE WAS ONLY ONE ARMOURED VEHICLE STILL IN THE PATH OF THE BRITISH FORCES. IT WAS THE COMMAND VEHICLE OF THE S.S. LEADER, A GREAT, SELF-PROPELLED GUN ...
WE ARE CLEAR. FULL SPEED ACROSS THE BRIDGE.

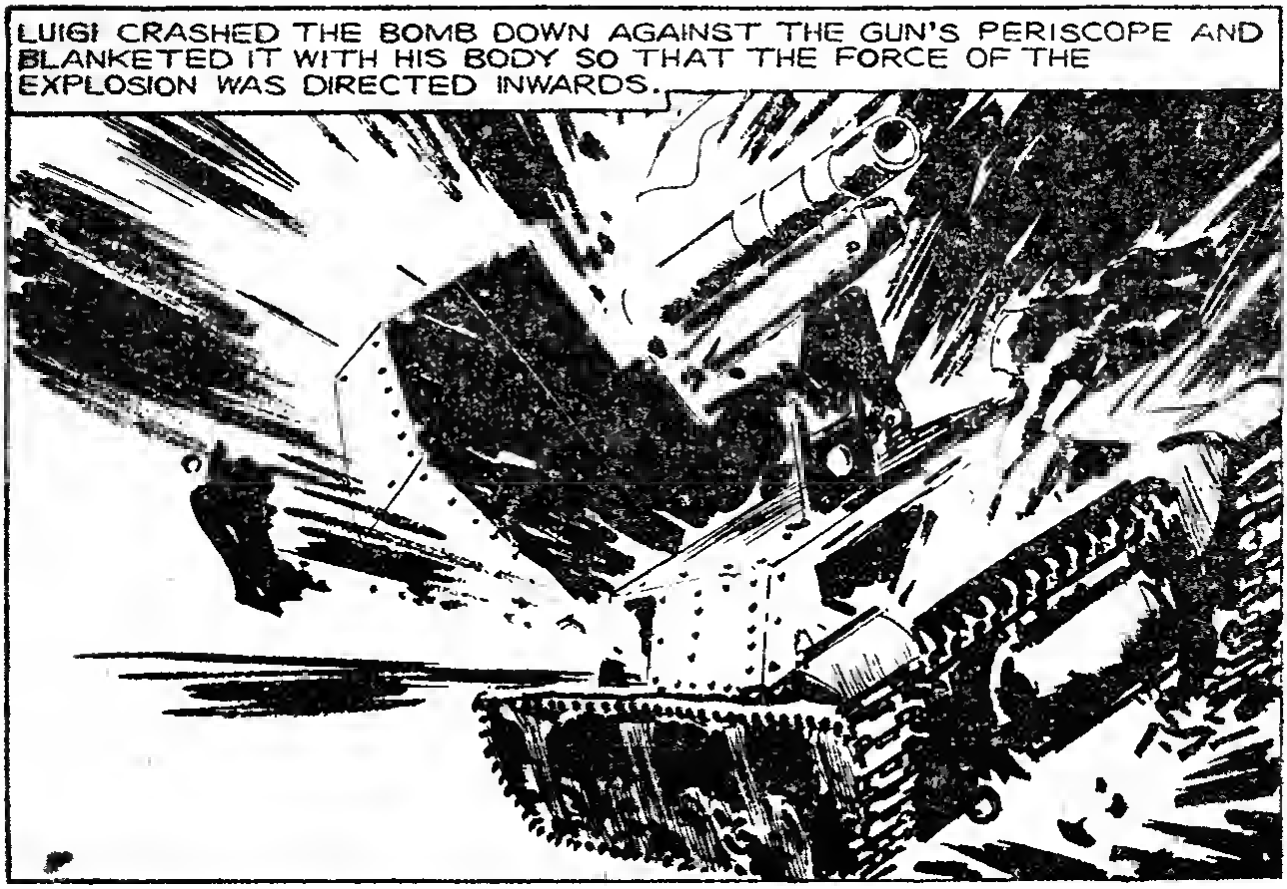
THE CAPTURED 88 M.M. MIGHT STILL HAVE STOPPED THAT SELF-PROPELLED GUN BUT AT THAT CRUCIAL MOMENT, ITS SICILIAN MAKE-SHIFT CREW WERE TAKEN FROM THE FLANK.
WHERE ARE THE BRITISH ? WHERE ARE THEY ?

THE BIG GUN LUMBERED SAFELY ACROSS THE BRIDGE AND SLEWED TO A HALT UNDER THE PROTECTIVE OVERHANG OF THE CLIFF, THE LONG BARREL TRAVERSING MENACINGLY ON TO THE APPROACH ROAD.
ACHTUNG, COMMAND / THIS IS STANDARTENFUEHRER KOLN. WE ARE IN POSITION COVERING THE BRIDGE.

THE SIGNAL IN TRELAWNEY'S HEADPHONES WAS GETTING STRONGER ...
HELLO, RED ONE, THIS IS ABLE LEADER. WE MUST BE NEARING THE BRIDGE. OVER.
HELLO, ABLE LEADER. PROCEED WITH CARE. AN S.P. GUN IS COVERING THE ROAD.
THE MOMENT SADLER POKES HIS NOSE ROUND THE CORNER THAT BLIGHTER WILL GET HIM!
AS LONG AS THE S.P. GUN COMMANDED THE BRIDGE, THE BRITISH ATTACK COULD BE HELD LONG ENOUGH FOR GERMAN FORCES TO RETRIEVE THE SITUATION. THEN ...
HEY! WHAT THE DEVIL? LUIGI, COME BACK!
CLUTCHING AN ANTI-TANK GRENADE IN HIS HAND, THE SOLE SURVIVOR OF AVERNO RACED THROUGH THE TREES AND DROPPED DOWN ON TO THE ROAD ...
THEY SHALL NOT ESCAPE! THE BLOOD OF MY PEOPLE CRIES OUT FOR VENGEANCE!

CLUTCHING THE BOMB TO HIS CHEST, LUIGI RAN BLINDLY, DESPERATELY TOWARDS THE GUN . . .
ACH! THE FOOL WILL NOT GET FAR!


THE SHOT FROM THE PILLBOX CAUGHT LUIGI IN THE SHOULDER, BUT NOTHING COULD STOP HIM NOW. HE WAS CLAMBERING ON TO THE GUN BEFORE THE CREW REALISED THEIR DANGER.
I HEAR SOMETHING COMING ROUND THE CORNER. STAND BY TO FIRE!
ON TARGET!
ACHTUNG! THERE IS SOMEONE ON THE HULL!


LUIGI CRASHED THE BOMB DOWN AGAINST THE GUN'S PERISCOPE AND BLANKETED IT WITH HIS BODY SO THAT THE FORCE OF THE EXPLOSION WAS DIRECTED INWARDS.

IN SHOCKED SILENCE, SALVATORE AND TRELAWNEY CAME DOWN TO THE ROAD AS THE ARMOURED SPEARHEAD THUNDERED ACROSS THE BRIDGE.
GOOD SHOW, EH? BETWEEN US WE DID IT!

Printed in England by Messrs. Percy Brothers Ltd., Manchester 1, and published each month by Fleetway Publications Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Advertisement Offices: Tallis House, Tallis Street, London, E.C.4. Sole Agents Australasia, Messrs. Gordon & Gotch Ltd. South Africa. Central News Agency Ltd. Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Messrs. Kingstons Ltd. WAR PICTURE LIBRARY is sold subject to the following conditions, that it shall not, without the written consent of the Publishers first given, be lent, resold, hired out or otherwise disposed of by way of Trade except at the full retail price as shown on the cover; and that it shall not be lent, resold, hired out or otherwise disposed of in a mutilated condition, or in any unauthorised cover by way of Trade: or affixed to or as part of any publication or advertising, literary or pictorial matter whatsoever. 7/10/63

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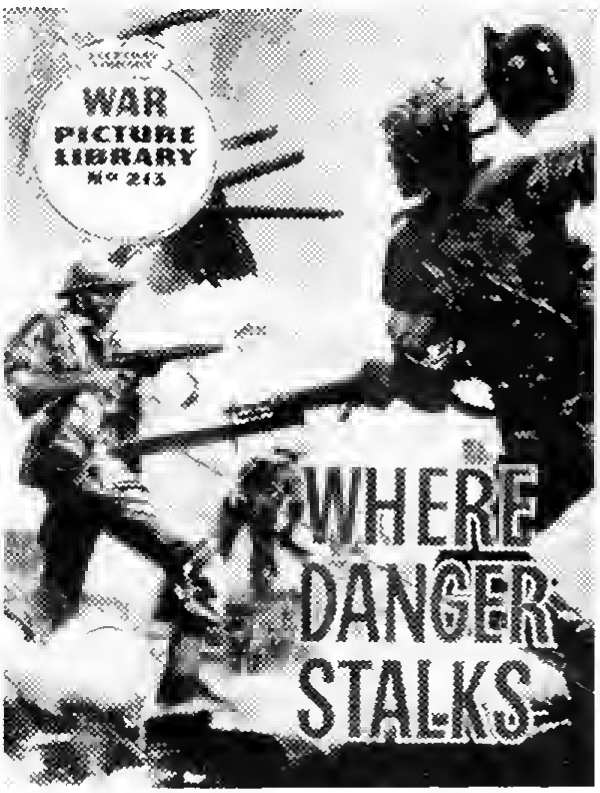

Three men, flung together by fate into Dieppe's fiery cauldron, found glory and courage when all seemed lost.

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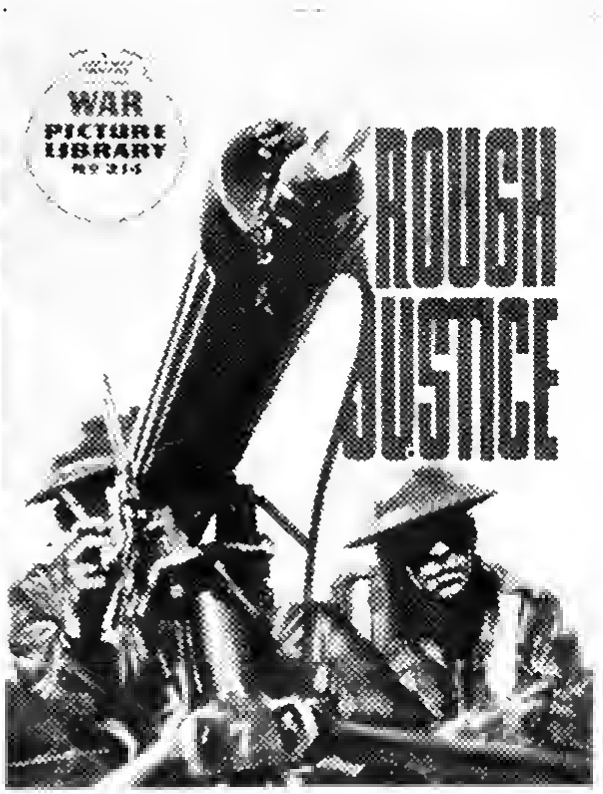

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